

SCOPING DOCUMENT
MONTE CRISTO/WHEATGRASS ASPEN TREATMENTS

USDA FOREST SERVICE
WASATCH-CACHE NATIONAL FOREST
OGDEN RANGER DISTRICT

WEBER, RICH, AND CACHE COUNTY

REPLY DUE: JULY 14, 2003

WHAT IS BEING PROPOSED?

The Ogden Ranger District, is proposing to burn approximately 4,000-5,000 acres of aspen and stands of aspen mixed with conifer. While burning will be the most common method of treatment, the project will also include situations where brush and trees will be cut to help achieve better ignition or protect other resources such as highways, fences or riparian areas. Hand crews using chainsaws will be the only "mechanical" means of treating the vegetation.

The Forest Service only uses fire as a tool under certain conditions, which makes the results predictable. The agency considers weather conditions, season of the year, fuel moisture content and other factors before it can light a prescribed fire. We are proposing to light the fires both on the ground by hand and from the air by using helicopters. Most of this prescribed burning will take place in the fall, though some units may be burned during the spring. An activity associated with burning is the creation of handline. A handline is a line of cleared vegetation that is used to create a defendable limit to the fire. In many cases roads, trails, and natural openings can be used for the same purpose.

Once the burns have been completed, livestock use within the treatment areas will be curtailed until monitoring has determined that the aspen regeneration has been successful.

LOCATION

The area being considered for treatment is between the Monte Cristo area and Causey Reservoir, and primarily south of Highway 39.

The maps show both treatment areas (delineated with white lines) and burn area boundaries (delineated with a fine black line). The treatment area is the setting where we intend to burn the vegetation. The burn area boundary is an area that is typically larger than the intended treatment area where fire planners identify limits beyond which the fire

should not burn. Only in some instances such as a ridgeline, road or other firebreak are the treatment area boundary and burn area boundary the same.

Based on past experience, we estimate that prescribed fire will burn about half of the acres within the burn area boundary and nearly all of the vegetation within the treatment area. This results in a desirable mosaic of vegetation composed of different sizes. The following table accounts for these differences.

The table shows information on the estimated treatment area, burn boundary acres, total affected acres and affected livestock allotment by unit. Total affected acres are calculated by subtracting the treatment area acres from the burn boundary acres, dividing by two and then adding the treatment area acres back in. For example, units 97-15-1 and 97-15-2 are in the same burn boundary. The calculation for the total affected acres for the burn boundary is: $(820 - (123 + 94) / 2) + (123 + 94) = 518$.

ACRES BY TREATMENT UNIT

<u>Units</u>	<u>Treatment Area Acres</u>	<u>Burn Boundary Acres</u>	<u>Total Affected Acres</u>	<u>Allotment</u>
97-15-1	123	820	518	Woodruff (Cattle)
97-15-2	94			Woodruff (Cattle)
97-14-1	207	424	315	Dry Bread/Blake Hollow (Sheep)
97-14-2	32	124	78	Little Monte (Sheep)
97-14-3	510	966	738	Dry Bread (Sheep)
97-15-8	178	272	225	Bountiful (Sheep)
97-15-5	230	958	683	Bountiful (Sheep)
97-15-4	178			Bountiful (Sheep)
96-16-4	35	690	451	None
97-16-5	53			None
97-16-6	124			None
97-16-10	195	841	565	None
97-16-11	94			None
97-16-2	39	873	507	None
97-16-3	40			None
97-16-1	63			None
97-16-9	191	565	378	None
TOTALS	2386		4458	

Units 97-16-1,2,3,4,5,6, 9,10 and 11 are within the recommended South Fork Wilderness Area, which is described in the Wasatch-Cache National Forest Revised Forest Plan (March 2003).

PURPOSE AND NEED

Throughout the pre-settlement period, fire was an integral part of the ecology of the forests of the intermountain west. For the past 150 years, however, fire, in many cases, has been excluded from its natural role, and many of the aspen communities on the east side of the Ogden Ranger District are being replaced by conifers. Also, the overall aspen landscape is primarily old aged and younger replacement aspen are lacking.

On the Wasatch-Cache National Forest, the percentage of existing aspen cover type is estimated to be just 34 percent of its historical range. This change from aspen to conifer dominated forests reduces both plant and animal diversity. This reduces the diversity of wildlife habitat and may lower carrying capacities for species that prefer aspen.

By using prescribed fire to treat these stands the following will be achieved:

- The process of creating a more desirable balance of age classes will be initiated.
- Wildlife habitat conditions for species that prefer aspen will be improved.
- Additional future losses of the aspen vegetation type due to conifer replacement will be curtailed.
- At the landscape level, the aspen community type will move towards conditions that were present in the past.
- The effects of and potential for large-scale, stand-replacing fires will be reduced.

REQUEST FOR COMMENTS

Please contact us with any questions, comments, or suggestions you may have regarding this project. Public comment will be taken until July 14, 2003. Comments can be mailed to the Ogden Ranger District, ATTN: Monte Cristo/Wheatgrass Aspen Treatments, 507 25th Street, Suite 103, Ogden, Utah 84401, or by calling (801) 625-5112.

Sincerely,



CHIP SIBBERNSEN
District Ranger

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